
Little Grove House and Grounds

Sale and demolition

In 1932 East Barnet lost one of its historic houses when Little Grove was demolished and its estate developed. The district was becoming popular with developers as the Piccadilly Underground opened up London's suburbs to potential commuters. Like that of most other large mansions in the area, Little Grove's fate, demolition and redevelopment, was almost inevitable.

Little Grove house, with three acres of 'pleasure grounds', had already been put up for auction on 21 June 1927 by Hampton & Sons at St James' Estate Rooms S.W.1. Also on sale at the time were three other lots described as 'exceptionally fine building sites' varying from 1¼ to 3 acres [a total of at least 5½ acres] and a lodge that Hamptons suggested could be adapted into a 'Delightful Little House'. The estate had at one time covered an even greater area and the majority of that land seems already to have been sold off. The main house without the additional land was again put up for auction in October 1931.

The 1931 auction particulars, produced by Stanley Parkes & Brown and Hampton & Sons, described Little Grove 'as a singularly well placed and important commodious freehold residence' with 'well-timbered grounds of over 3½ acres', approached down a drive from Cat Hill. It had halls, three reception rooms, a music or dance room (with a flat over it), a billiard room, two staircases, ten bed rooms, four baths and 'domestic offices' in the basement. There was a separate lodge, garages, stabling and laundry and outbuildings that included a bake house, store room and

PARTICULARS

The Fine Old Freehold Residence

known as

LITTLE GROVE

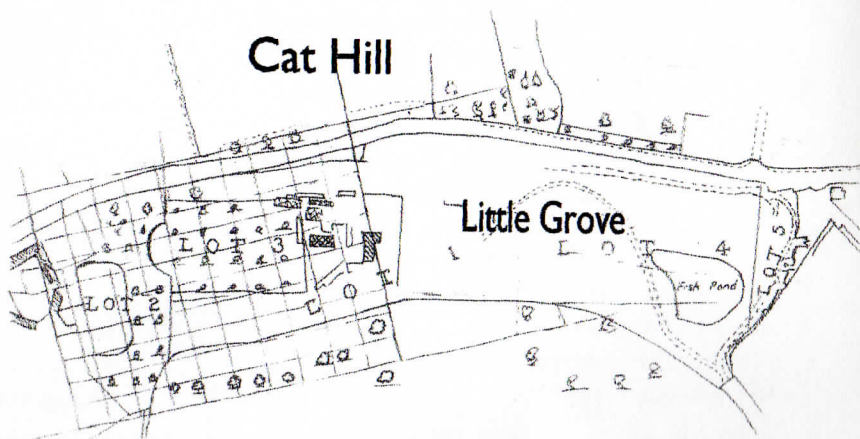
EAST BARNET - HERTFORDSHIRE

ON THE BORDERS OF MIDDLESEX



The 1931 sales particulars

game larders. A vaulted former chapel was still standing, although in need of repair. The house had central and independent heating systems, electric light, gas, water and main drainage and had been connected to the telephone system but the actual telephone had been removed. The garden front had wooden louver shutters at the windows. The hall had a black and white marble floor an elegant gallery-ballustrade and the great music room had a moulded ceiling.



Enhanced plan from 1927 sale particulars

Early references

The roots of Little Grove's history lay in an earlier area of woodland called Danegrove that derived its name from Richard ate Den (1291). Early references include:

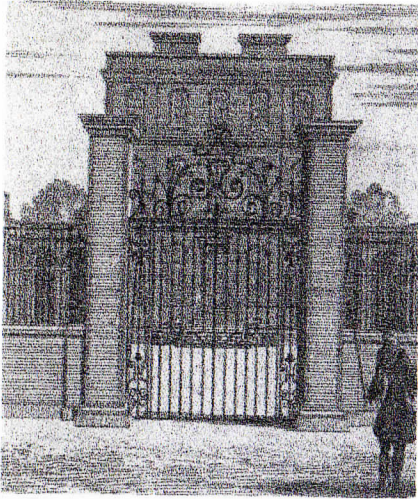
1554 - David Woodruff, haberdasher, Alderman and High Sheriff of the City of London owned the house.

16 April 1556 - William Copwood surrendered a grove called Danegrove to David and Elizabeth Woodroffe, citizen and alderman of London.

1653 - Little Grove was bought by Henry Parker citizen and paint stainer of London.

1680 - Catherine Fanshaw, as executrix for her mother Anne Fanshaw widow of Sir Richard Fanshaw, sold Little Grove to a John Richardson

for £1,800. It was from the Richardson family that John Cotton acquired the estate where he was to build his new house.



The 1719 Cotton House

The house demolished in 1932 had been built in 1719 for a John Cotton of the Middle Temple, who already owned other land locally. The eldest son of John Cotton of Hamstall-Ridware, Staffordshire, he initially called the house 'New Place' but it soon reverted to the name that had long been associated with the estate, that of 'Little Grove'.

John Cotton's House

This large and rather grand house had a classical portico and wings. It was built on the south side of Cat Hill on the rising ground overlooking the village from the east. The main entrance faced west and the house was approached via a court-yard, flanked by offices and stabling, and enclosed by grilles of open iron-work. The house was originally built of brick but, at a later stage of its life, parts of the house were coated with 'compo' to give the impression of stone. The Cotton family arms, an eagle, were featured on the headings of the lead water pipes from the roof of the central building.

Cotton was not to enjoy his new house for long. Following serious financial problems he sold the house in about 1728, dying shortly afterwards.

After John Cotton

The Sharpe Family 1734

John Sharpe of Little Grove married Olive Cartwright. In March 1752 the estate was included in a settlement on the marriage of their son, Fane William to Mary Newport. John died on 22 Oct 1756. To the poor of East

Barnet, where he was buried on 1 November 1756, he left £10 and Little Grove was settled on his wife for her lifetime. His will stated:

... whereas my house at East Barnett with the estate thereto belonging is settled on my wife for life, I do hereby give my said wife the use of all the household furniture in my said house at East Barnett of all kinds, woollen and linen, useful and ornamental, books, pictures, china and everything else, with all brewing utensils, etc., and also all the Green House Plants, etc and also my Waggon, Carts, Cart horses, and Saddle horses (except the horse with the side saddle and furniture, which my daughter usually rides on, which horse, etc I give to my said daughter) for life and after her death to my son Fane William Sharpe ...

Olive Sharpe died 19 Feb 1760 and Mary, his son's wife on 3 August 1766, leaving an only child Mary. F.W. Sharpe became tenant for life of the East Barnet property. In 1767 F.W. moved to another house and, through a private Act of Parliament, the estate of 43.5 acres was vested in trustees for sale. They sold it for £4,000 to Edward Willes of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Fane William Sharpe, died on 21 October 1771. He directed that the £4,000 from the sale of Little Grove should be invested and the income given to his uncle Joshua Sharpe for life, with the 'remainder going to his own daughter'. A house and lands in East Barnet, with an estate of just over 150 acres, was bought for £5,157 with an additional mortgage being raised of £1,157. It probably included part of Mr Hadley's estate (Oak Hill) and land later bought by Mr Cass.

Mary Sharpe lived at South Lodge until her marriage aged 29 on 14 Oct 1782 to the Revd Dr Beauvoir, a widower with three sons and two daughters from Totteridge. On his death she married Andrew Douglas MD of Savile Row. She died in 1807.

Edward Willes - 1767

Edward Willes of Lincoln's Inn Fields, solicitor-general, was the second son of Sir John Willes, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. He entered Lincoln's Inn in 1740 and was called to the bar in 1746. He married Anne, daughter of the Revd Edward Taylor of Sutton, Wilts and had three sons, John, Edward and William-Shippen. His will of 15 December 1786 left the Little Grove estate, with two cottages that he had bought from Mr Sleath, to his wife and two younger sons, in trust for sale.

Little Grove was let following Willes' death and was tenanted by David 7th Viscount Stormont, KT then the 2nd Earl of Mansfield. He was living at Little Grove by September 1789 and died in 1796 at Brighthelmstone.

Lord Tempest

In May 1794 the property was sold for £8,499 to John Tempest of Wynyard, Durham MP. He died at Wynyard 13 Aug 1794, shortly after completing the purchase, and the property went to his wife. Mrs Anne Tempest stayed on at Little Grove until her death on 31 July 1817.

She built a chapel, next to the courtyard, on the west, where the first service was performed by her chaplain the Revd Mr Lake on Sunday 12 April 1801. Mrs Tempest set up a school for training young girls in the village for service. In her will of 1817 she left Little Grove to her brother Gore Townshend and William Townsend in trust for sale. She ordered that no timber should be cut nor stock sold between her death and the day of auction. The money from the sale was divided between her six nephews Thomas, Henry, Edward-James, John, Joseph and Frederick Townsend.

Thomas Wilson and Frederick Cass 1817 and 1827

On 25 September 1817 the estate was sold to Thomas Wilson for £10,900 the timber was valued at the additional sum of £2,495. 16s. 9d. He sold it to Frederick Cass of Beaulieu Lodge, Winchmore Hill in November 1827 for £13,500.

Cass was the eleventh child of a London merchant, William Cass of Coleman Street and Beaulieu Lodge. He was High Sherriff of Hertfordshire in 1844-5 and his son, the rector of St Mary's Monken Hadley, wrote histories of East Barnet and South Mimms.

Frederick Cass extended the house, erecting a western wing. His son wrote that he removed the earlier chapel. [F.C.Cass, *The Parish of East Barnet* p. 123 – however the sale particulars of 1931 refer to a former chapel building.] Cass died at Little Grove aged 73 on 17 May 1861.

The V&A holds a copy of a bill for glassware supplied by Messrs Jones of Ludgate, that shows that whilst Frederick Cass was living at Little Grove on 21 June 1839 he bought 12 large ruby claret glasses, 12 shallow bowl champagne glasses with cut stems and with an engraved border. A note added 'this gentleman had a very handsome chandelier of Crook and Jones that takes two days cleaning'.

A rare reference to one of the Cass servants at the house has brought the following information to our notice from a family historian:

Sarah Blakely Say was born in Essex, daughter of Samuel Say and Mary Blakely Say, near what later became Southend, in 1792. She was still there in 1830. But she is at Little Grove in the 1841 Census as "female servant," 1851 as "needlewoman," and 1861 as "housekeeper." The staff seems to be listed in the censuses in pecking order, and she gradually rose in the ranks. There were 7 or 8 on the staff at Little Grove in each census... Sarah died in April 1867 at New Barnet, listed on the death certificate as a domestic servant, so perhaps she was still working. Cause of death: gangrene in both legs. Not an attractive end.

Campbell and Stern 1862 and 1871

The estate was sold in July 1862 to Alexander Henry Campbell. After further extension the house was sold yet again, in December 1871, to Sigismund James Stern, a merchant and banker of London. He died at Little Grove on Friday 15 May 1885 aged 77. Mrs Stern died in 1908.

During the 1914-18 War Littlegrove was used by the Army.

Shirley Grove

From 1921 to 1924 the property was owned by Shirley Kellogg an actress. She was reputed to have spent £10,000 on restoring the house. Whilst she lived there the house was referred to as Shirley Grove and an E. Lawrence wrote a letter to the National Trust on 19 April 1922 headed 'Shirley Grove' with a rather romanticised description of the house. He was intending to buy the property. He wrote that the house had been redecorated at a cost of £8,000 by Maple & Co. Ltd., of Tottenham Court Road.

... The walls of the house both inside and outside are three feet thick ... [it] has six dungeons or cellars with 13th century vaulted early Gothic ceilings, in one of the cells are pillars for plank beds, two hooks in the ceiling ... adjoining are two rooms leading into each other, one has a fire place in it, both rooms have window shutters inside 1 inch thick of metal. The entrance out of the corridor has an iron door over half a ton in weight ... In the corridor there is an oval shaped stove, I believe it is made of bronze, on the front of it is the royal arms, with the Lion on top minus the crown [see Royal Arms Edward 3rd reign] on

each side of the stove, there are two raised figures, De Bohun's badge a swan with three roses in its beak; below the badge is the effigy of a lady ...

In the Plantation about 200 yards from the house, I found three oak posts 10" in diameter 8 yards long, grown over with dead leaves and ivy. Nailed to two of the posts were gibbet chains, two small length chains for legs above ankles, iron body belt, nailed with 4" nails to post with strong chains for body and arms nailed to posts.

In the garden in rockery was the Es-cappol badge of the de Bohun family ... There are large blocks of ancient building material all over the grounds, composed of dark burnt brick mixed with ... stone and bricks ... that it takes tempered chisel to cut ... I have excavated and found an ancient brick work wall foundation 8 feet in thickness 2'6" from surface. Massive trees have grown over and above the old foundations of the wall.

There is a chapel, size about 6 yards long 5 yards wide, it has an early English Gothic vaulted ceiling, in it three 13th century stained glass windows, on one is the arms of Sir R. de Capel (family name of the Earls of Essex)... there are number of different shields delineated on the stained glass about the same period, under each corner of the vaulted roof are busts of Henry III and his Queen also Edmund second son of Henry III or otherwise Edward I and his Queen, all of the four busts are wearing the St Edmund's crown, the walls of the chapel were until May 2nd last year, 1921, covered with 5 1.2" Roman glass enamel tiles; I was informed by an old expert in enamel at Messrs Doultons & Co Porcelain Works, Lambeth. (One I took to the works for examination). His opinion was that the tiles are 2,000 years old. He stated there were only five tiles similar in all London, they were on the wall in the Roman Bath, Strand Lane, London.

One of the windows in the chapel, there is a lozenge supported by two children represented as Angels, with wings extended or Argt; in the centre of the Lozenge is an upright crozier with bottom of staff standing the letter of E. old English.

On another window are delineated in Old English capital letters E.L. about 3" in depth; between the letters E.L. is the Plantagenet rope bade, intertwined with the letters; underneath the letters are two cantons with each a Peacock standing on the branches of a fruited vine.

Over the entrance door is stained glass; are three Badges of three Ostrich Feathers, or underneath them are a roundel with an eight rayed or Mullet (Star) the outer rim of roundel 12" wide. Az Bottom of rim is delineated a Barbel or the Barbel is the Badge of Sir Richard de la Berem on whom the Black Prince conferred the honour of him to wear the Ostrich Feathers, or, after the memorable field of Cressie, is he Lord Lascells' ancestor. Another shield arg., Chevrongu. Two Lions ramp; above chevron; gu on Lion below chevron gu.

An old Saxon Greek Cross, about a yard square on the arms of the cross are a sharp pointed sword with cross guard raised on each arm of the Cross (the arms were gold gilded but came off with scrubbing them) they lay on a metal az; with small black sword delineated as similar to arms of the City?

The entrance gates at each end of the carriage drive ... bronze metal and upright bars ... square over each bar is de Lys; the gates and the side fencing appear to have been ... and various devices delineated on them.



*A stone photographed in the garden of a house on Cat Hill
Could this have been one of the stones referred to above
and who was William de Broke 1711-1791*

The Grounds

The earlier house was referred to in the 1693 will of John Richardson, with its Great Hall, its gardens, orchards, outhouses and lands called Little Grove. The will also writes of other copyhold lands that Richardson

had bought separately from a Robert and Abigail Norris and included a covenant not to fell the elm trees that stood in a row on the north side of the garden or any other trees, without his son Richard's consent. There is also a reference to fruit trees and other trees that were growing in the part of his garden and orchard or fish pond at Little Grove for which Richard was caring. In a later will of 1756 John Sharpe wrote of 'all the Green House Plants', so presumably a greenhouse had been built by that stage. By 1767, when the estate was put up for sale, it covered 43.5 acres. The estate was bought by a John Deane and he and his wife Jacomina Maria sold it in April 1734 to John Sharpe of Lincoln's Inn.

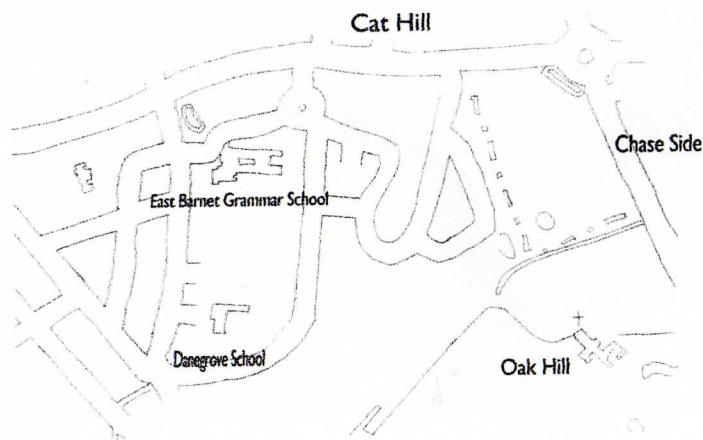
Mrs Willis made considerable alterations to the gardens, plantations, and grounds. She sold some land to Mr Kingston of Oak Hill and bought other land from John Bacon of The Friary, Friern Barnet that had once belonged to the Hadley family, had passed to Mr Joshua Sharpe and his niece, and from them, in September 1788, to Bacon. Arthur Young the famous agriculturist visited Little Grove while he was living at North Myms and advised the Willes about the garden.



A section of the surviving wall of the kitchen garden

In 1827, when Cass bought the estate it covered just over 54 acres and the purchase included its timber. The majority of the estate was freehold but five acres were copyhold of the manor of East and Chipping Barnet. Cass 'constructed the piece of water in the park' and in 1836 bought a further 40 acres of land that at one time been owned by the Sharpes. This would increase the total land holding to 94 acres. The majority of this land must have been sold off in the period up to 1927.

In 1932 the gardens that had once seen the hand of Capability Brown, (he had done unspecified work in 1768 for £700) were described as overgrown but the plans still existed (where are they now I wonder?) and it was suggested they could be restored to their former glory. On the south front there was a stone-paved terrace, a broad gravelled terrace with stone steps and grass slopes that led down to the flower gardens which were arranged in parterres. There was a retaining wall and a lower walk. On the east side there was a gravelled terrace and a lawn for tennis, on the west a potting shed, plantation, flower garden, gravelled walks and wide herbaceous border, a warm brick wall, a kitchen garden and a corner with a large ornamental pond and fruit trees. Beyond the pond was a 5ft wide pathway out to Cat Hill.



Drawing of modern road layout drawn by Fiona Jones

Littlegrove School opened in September 1933 on land at the western end of the estate. That school is now linked with Daneland school and they are jointly known as Danegrove. A tender of £21,922 had been accepted in 1932 to build Littlegrove elementary school to accommodate 576 junior mixed and infant children. Another school, East Barnet Grammar School, was built on land closer to the site of the old house, opening in 1937.

Demolition and redevelopment

The house's demolition in 1931/2, following the death of the former owner Mr J.J. O'Brien, aroused much conjecture about its past and a number of articles appeared in the local press describing interesting and mysterious cellars that had been found. It was reported that in the dungeons written on the wall was scratched, 'Here I am today, Here I'll be tomorrow, Let no man ever say I've not my share of sorrow'.

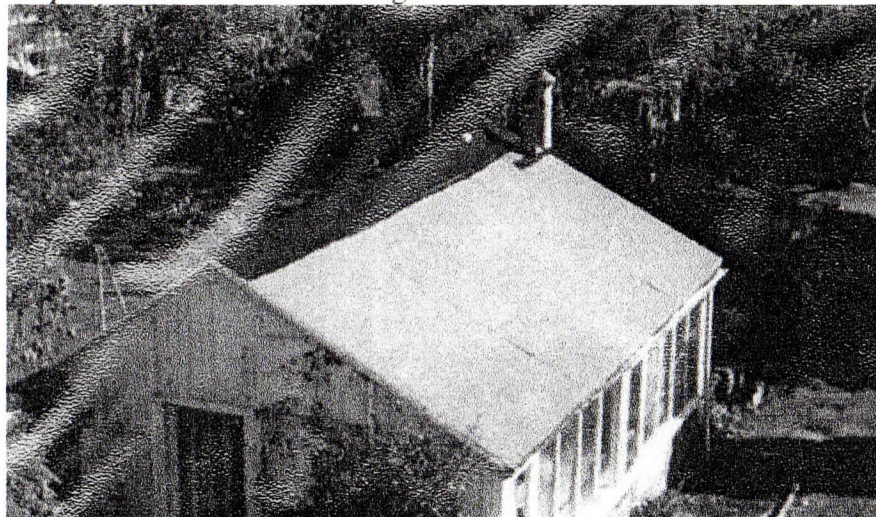
As the house was demolished items of particular value or interest were auctioned off. They included mantelpieces, oak panelling, lead piping, and roofing. The 'ancient dungeon doors' were bought to be rehung at Seller's Hall, Nether street, Finchley and the hinges, fine examples of smith's work of the 16th century, have been acquired by agents acting for American purchasers. Hopper heads and old oak. The iron gates at the western entrance, that date back to 1588, were offered by the owner Mr. H.E. Bennett of Winchmore Hill to the East Barnet Council, for erection at the entrance to the new public park at Oak Hill. Iron staircases, york and portland stone, leaden hopper heads, oak timbers were also put on sale.

A pencil note signed C.R.S. stated 'Some of the above are at the Folklore Park, Hadley Hall, New Barnet July 1934'. It is possible that some of these items may now be included in the Abbey Museum's collection in Australia.

A local solicitor, V. Wilson of Oakleigh Park Station, wrote on behalf of a Mr. A.T. Bennett of Garrydene, Green Dragon Lane, Winchmore Hill, to C.L. Stevenson on 21 January 1932 offering the gift of a leaden pump that had been unearthed during the demolition of the chapel. (Was that destined for Barnet Museum?)

The land that had once formed part of the Little Grove's estate is now covered in houses built in the 1930s. Many of these were built by the local builders, the Leak brothers who kept two properties for themselves,

a bungalow in Chestnut Grove and 110 Cat Hill together with a long section of the walled garden that linked the two properties, the large pond and a bothy. Their foresight has meant that there remains today visible signs of the old estate garden including a long section of wall, the bothy, the pond as well as trees and hedgerows.



The Bothy in the 1980s

Sources:

Barnet Press

Barnet Museum Local History file HO/30

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Patent Court Rolls